

Lawyer Expectations

Upon being hired as your legal counsel, your lawyer should expect that you will:

- Be on time for appointments and not take up an excessive amount of time with visits or phone calls relating to minor details or petty matters.
- Discuss all facts of the matter, and not withhold information about the case.
- Bring necessary information and documents to the first appointment.
- Notify the lawyer of changes or any new developments.
- Ask questions to clarify anything that may confuse you about your case.
- Follow your lawyer's advice.
- Understand that no lawyer can guarantee results in a contested matter.
- Be patient and understand that legal matters are rarely "open and shut" cases — they require time and research.
- Pay a reasonable fee for the work performed.

Changing Lawyers

You have a right to expect competent representation. If you are unhappy with your lawyer or you choose to handle your case, there are several things you can do:

- Talk with your lawyer to express your concerns. You may want to send a letter that outlines your specific complaints. Allow the lawyer an opportunity to correct the problem.
- If still dissatisfied, you may discharge your lawyer. In most instances, you may simply inform the lawyer of your decision to terminate his or her services, and the lawyer must then withdraw from representation. (In some situations, withdrawal may be obtained only by order of the court.) You and your lawyer have a contractual relationship. Even if you discharge a lawyer, you are liable for some fees and costs. For example, you may have to

pay a reasonable amount for the work already done on your case, as well as for costs that have already been incurred.

- If you believe your lawyer has acted improperly, you may contact the WSBA at 800-945-9722 or 206-443-9722 for more information about your rights. Information about filing a grievance against a lawyer may be found at www.wsba.org/info/operations/odc/grievance.htm.

Legal Fees

It is appropriate — and important — to discuss fees when you first visit a lawyer. You have a right to know how you will be charged, how much the case is likely to cost, and when you have to pay. For a discussion of legal fees, see the separate WSBA pamphlet titled "Legal Fees."

Other Sources of Help

There are many ways to solve legal problems. Government and consumer complaint agencies, counseling, consumer advocates at local newspapers, radio or television stations, small claims courts (for limited amounts), and dispute resolution centers are options that should be considered.

This pamphlet was prepared as a public service by the Washington State Bar Association. It contains general information and is not intended to apply to any specific situation. If you need legal advice or have questions about the application of the law in a particular matter, you should consult a lawyer.

Lawyer Referral Service

Clark County	360-695-0599
King County	206-267-7010
Kitsap County	360-373-2426
Lewis County	360-748-0430
Pierce County	253-383-3432
Snohomish County	425-388-3018



WSBA

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Consulting a Lawyer



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Consumer Information Published in the Public Interest
by the Washington State Bar Association



Consulting a Lawyer

This pamphlet is intended to help you decide when you need a lawyer, and to provide guidelines for choosing and using one. For information on legal fees, see the “Legal Fees” pamphlet.

The best time to see a lawyer is before a problem occurs—not when you are in legal trouble. Preventive law can save time, trouble and money. Many situations involving legal rights and responsibilities can be handled without the assistance of a lawyer. However, if you are about to undertake a major obligation, or if circumstances are confusing, consult a lawyer. A lawyer can analyze the legal implications of a situation, offer advice, and decide how best to protect your rights.

To help you decide if you need a lawyer, ask yourself these questions:

- What is at stake — and what are the consequences if the problem is ignored?
- Are there other ways to solve the matter?
- How much is it likely to cost to hire a lawyer?
- Am I knowledgeable about the law governing this problem?

Some of the circumstances that may require professional legal assistance are:

- Buying or selling real estate.
- Any major financial transaction.
- Signing a lease or contract with major financial considerations.
- Marriage, divorce, or adoption.
- If you are involved in a lawsuit.
- If you are arrested or charged with a crime.
- Starting or closing a business.
- Drafting a will or other estate planning.
- If you have tax concerns or financial problems.
- When you have a serious accident.
- When you make appearances, applications, or appeals to government agencies or boards.

Representing Yourself in Court

You may represent yourself in court and handle your own legal matters. Self-help kits and preprinted forms are available from stationers, libraries, and other sources and on the Internet for making wills, filing for divorce, and for other legal matters. These items do not consider individual needs, differences, and complications, however, so they may not be appropriate for you and they may not meet legal requirements under Washington law.

Many laws are complex and are frequently changed. Lawyers are trained to explain the law; to provide legal assistance; and to be aware of court rules and procedures, filing requirements, deadlines, and other details which a non-lawyer could easily overlook. This role is important, since judges and court personnel are not generally allowed to give you any legal advice.

Selecting a Lawyer

Selecting a lawyer is a personal matter. You must judge which lawyer will be best for you. Before you decide, you may want to compare several lawyers or law firms.

Keep practical considerations in mind: the lawyer’s area of expertise, prior experience and reputation, convenience of office location, amount of fees charged, and the length of time a case may take. A lawyer’s communication skills are another factor. Willingness and ability to talk to you in a language you understand and answer your questions will influence how well informed you are about the progress of your case.

You may also want to consider your personal preferences about age, sex, and personality of the lawyer. These may guide you in selecting someone with whom you feel most comfortable. If you want to know whether the lawyer has professional liability (malpractice) insurance, you can ask or you can check the online member directory, accessible from www.wsba.org.

Trust the lawyer you hire and believe he or she will do the best job possible in protecting your legal rights. Be aware that most lawsuits and other legal work are not “sure things.” Be cautious of a lawyer

who guarantees results. No lawyer can win every case, and sometimes the best legal advice may not be what you want to hear.

Asking questions and checking different sources can help you in locating and choosing a lawyer. Among the sources to use in finding a lawyer are:

- **Recommendations** from friends or family, coworkers, business or professional contacts, and others can be helpful. Also, a lawyer may be able to refer you to another lawyer with special expertise to handle your particular matter. Investigate recommendations and evaluate whether the referral is appropriate for your needs.
- **Lawyer referral services**, sponsored by county bar associations, are operated throughout the state. For a modest fee (to help cover the program’s administrative costs), an initial appointment with a lawyer will be arranged. After this interview, the lawyer can advise you about the options you have for resolving the problem. If further legal services are recommended, you may make arrangements with that lawyer or contact someone else. (Please note: The Washington State Bar Association does not certify the experience or other qualifications of participants in lawyer referral services.)
- **Government legal services**, also called legal aid, offers free or low-cost legal assistance for eligible persons, usually based on income and the type of legal problem. In general, these agencies do not provide advice or representation in criminal cases or in matters where contingent fee arrangements may be made.
- **Bar associations** often provide free “pro bono” or volunteer legal assistance to those in financial need. Contact your county bar association.
- **Public defender offices** handle criminal cases. If you are accused of a crime but cannot afford a lawyer, a judge will either appoint a public defender or a private lawyer to represent you free of charge.
- **Directories**, including telephone directories, list lawyers, often classified by areas of practice. Other directories, such as the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory (www.martindale.com), list lawyers by state

and city and give biographical details on each lawyer, rating information, and summaries of the areas of practice. It is the lawyer’s own choice to be listed in these directories. Ask questions and rely on your own independent investigation before choosing a lawyer to represent you.

- **Advertisements**, paid for by the lawyer to solicit business, are no assurance of experience or competence. Do not rely exclusively on advertisements when selecting a lawyer.

Client Expectations

You hire a lawyer to work for you as your advocate or adviser. You should expect your lawyer to:

- Confer with you to pinpoint the problem.
- Advise you of your rights and responsibilities.
- Be candid with you about your problem, your prospects for success, the time it will take, and the advisability of accepting any settlement offered.
- Research and analyze all available facts and information relating to your problem.
- Represent your interests in and out of court.
- Prepare appropriate legal documents.
- Prepare legal arguments for presentation in court, if litigation is involved.
- Negotiate a settlement (when possible and advisable).
- Act with reasonable diligence and promptness.
- Keep you reasonably informed about the status of your case.
- Return your telephone calls and answer your questions or concerns.
- Discuss courses of action, alternatives, or consequences.
- Follow your decisions after advising you of possible actions to take.
- Discuss fees with you at your first visit, and reach an agreement confirming specific arrangements.
- Hold in confidence your confidential communications.
- Account to you for your property and funds.
- Exhibit the highest degree of ethical conduct.